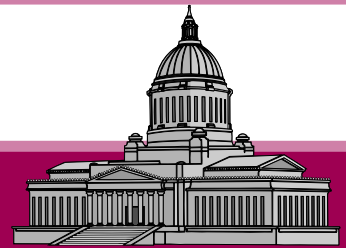




## Representative **Debbie Regala**

**27th District**

# **Legislative Report**



Dear Friend,

Tax relief, traffic congestion, education, crime and many other issues that affect you and your family are on the State Legislature's 1998 agenda. I'm writing to tell you about the legislative session that began on Jan. 12, and to invite your ideas about state problems and priorities.

I enjoy hearing from the people I represent and can serve you more effectively if we keep in touch. Please don't hesitate to call or write if you'd like to express your opinions or if I can help you in any way. I'm here to serve you, and you can always reach me quickly through any of the phone numbers or addresses listed on this page.

I'm honored to represent you in the Legislature, and look forward to serving you.

Sincerely,

*Debbie Regala*

Debbie Regala

### **Committees:**

- Agriculture & Ecology
- Appropriations
- Natural Resources  
*Ranking Democratic Member*
- Salmon Restoration Task Force  
*Ranking Democratic Member*

### **Here's how to reach me:**

#### **Address:**

P.O. Box 40600  
302 John L. O'Brien Bldg.  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

**Telephone:** (360) 786-7974

**E-mail:** [regala\\_de@leg.wa.gov](mailto:regala_de@leg.wa.gov)

**Toll-free Hotline:** 1-800-562-6000

**TDY:** 1-800-635-9993

### **Key dates in the legislative process during the 1998 session:**

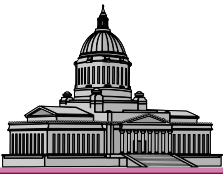
**Feb 6th .....** Bills must be out of committee to be considered this session.

**Feb 10th .....** Bills that have funding must be out of budget committees to be considered during this session.

**Feb 27th .....** Bills must be voted out of the House and Senate by 5:00 p.m. or they "die."

**March 6th ....** All bills must be approved by both chambers to be considered during the session. After being approved by both houses, legislation is sent to the governor. He either signs it and the bill becomes law or he vetoes it.

**March 12th ..** 60th day of the session...time to go home!!



# Representative **Debbie Regala**

## The budget picture

Our state general fund budget is in very good shape. State spending is about \$150 million below

### Expected Revenue for 1997-99

(in millions)

Retail sales .....	\$10,328
B&O .....	3,527
Property .....	2,442
Real Estate Excise Tax .....	629
Motor Vehicle Excise Tax .....	369
Liquor/Cigarette Tax .....	373
Insurance Premiums .....	296
Lottery .....	226
All other .....	813

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**Total ..... \$19,432**

### State Operating Budget (in millions)

Public schools .....	\$8,869
Higher Education .....	2,203
Human Services .....	5,946
General government .....	515
Natural Resources .....	235
Other* .....	1,317

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**Total ..... \$19,085**

*\*"Other" includes debt service, pensions and other education and special appropriations.*

the voter-approved spending limits set by Initiative 601, and the latest budget forecast predicts that revenues will exceed planned spending by \$345 million when this budget cycle ends in mid-1999 (See Chart). When surplus revenues carried over from earlier years are factored in, the state expects total reserves of \$861 million.

There is a general bipartisan agreement that this surplus allows us to increase state support for schools and other key priorities while still having

ample funds for further tax relief and "rainy day" savings. One of the major challenges of the session will be to find the right combination of tax-relief, state investments, and savings.

## Education

Thanks to our strong revenue picture, we have an excellent opportunity to reverse the slide in state funding for education, and this should be a top 1998 priority.

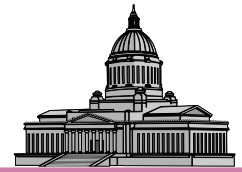
Many people are unaware that state support for schools has significantly declined in recent years. In fact, the current education budget spends \$68 less per student than last year, when inflation is considered. Legislative inaction would cause next year's school funding to be \$101 less than last year, and fully \$261 less than in 1993. These per student reductions add up to losses of between \$6,000 and \$7,000 for an average classroom since 1993!

I'd like to see some of the state's revenue surplus used to reduce student-teacher ratios, so students can get more personal attention in the classroom. Washington has the third highest student-teacher ratio in the nation, and our kids deserve better than that. I'm also impressed by Gov. Locke's proposal for a "Washington Reading Corps" which would enlist 25,000 volunteers to provide intensive tutoring in reading to 82,000 elementary school students. The main point, though, is that the Legislature must reverse the decline in school funding and reaffirm that education is the paramount constitutional duty of our state government.

## Salmon agreement

You may have heard that some of Washington's salmon and steelhead runs are threatened with extinction. You may not know that federal mandates to protect salmon on the Endangered Species List could devastate economic development, sports fishing, commercial fishing, agriculture, hydro-power and other essential uses of Washington's water resources.

# 27th District Legislative Report



We need a state salmon-recovery plan to prevent potentially harmful federal intervention and allow both our salmon stocks and our vital economic interests to grow. As the lead House Democrat on the Salmon Recovery Task Force, I'm working with a wide variety of people and interested groups to build the foundations of a balanced and effective plan for salmon recovery. The challenge is difficult due to the number of competing interests, but I'm cautiously optimistic we'll make good progress this year.

## Driving Under the Influence

Driving Under the Influence of alcohol or drugs kills and injures more people on our roads than any other cause. You can expect tougher D.U.I. laws in 1998, as this is a high priority issue for both the Governor and Legislature. Nothing is final yet, but ideas being discussed include: requiring breathalyzer car-ignition locks for persons convicted once of D.U.I., vehicle forfeiture for larger numbers of repeat D.U.I. offenders, and reducing the Blood Alcohol Concentration required for a D.U.I. conviction from .10% to .08%.

## Affordable Health Care

Tens of thousands of Washington's working poor depend on the state-subsidized Basic Health Plan (BHP) for the only health insurance they can afford. But the BHP urgently needs to be fixed. Co-payments and monthly premiums have soared — by nearly 140% in some cases — causing many employers and families to lose their health insurance.

Gov. Locke is proposing a \$14.6 million investment to improve BHP enrollments and is also calling for a "State Children's Health Insurance Program" to allow 2,700 more children in the Basic Health Plan by next year. The federal government will pay a large share of the children's program, so this is a good deal for state taxpayers. I will continue to strongly support improvements to the Basic Health Plan.

## The long-term care challenge

Our progress toward finding home and community care alternatives to state-funded nursing home care is threatened by a serious budget shortfall in long-term care services. The need for home and community care is growing much faster than was expected when the state budget was written last year. The result is a nearly \$40 million funding gap.

This is an extremely important issue, because many disabled or extremely frail senior citizens would needlessly be placed in nursing homes if the funding gap isn't solved. Ask any senior citizen whether home care is better than nursing home care, and you'll see why fixing the long-term care budget is a top priority for the senior community.

Taxpayers also have an important stake in this issue. For as the Senior Lobby warns, legislative inaction on long-term care funding would "inevitably result in higher and costlier nursing home caseloads" for the state.

I strongly support Governor Locke's proposal to use some of the state's revenue surplus to solve the long-term care problem. A growing number of legislators agree the problem must be solved during this 60-day session, so I'm cautiously optimistic we'll succeed.

## Transportation

Washington's transportation system is bursting at the seams, partly because our population is growing faster than at any time since the 1950's, and partly because people now need to travel much farther to meet work and family responsibilities than they did in previous decades.

Transportation revenues have failed to keep up with increasing demands because fuel-efficient cars have dramatically reduced the amount of gas taxes paid in relation to the number of miles traveled on our roads, highways and bridges. The result is billions of dollars of unfunded transportation needs and the problems you see daily:

# Representative **Debbie Regala** **27th District**

ever-longer traffic jams, more ruts and potholes, and more bridges that need repairs or improvements to meet earthquake-safety standards

The increased traffic, and the strain it puts on the road system, also affects the ability to move freight along the major transportation corridors of our district. Without the ability to move cargo in and out of our ports quickly, we lose our competitive edge with other ports.

While Governor Locke and nearly all legislators agree that we need to invest more in transportation, there are major disagreements about whether a gas tax is necessary this year to solve the problem. An audit of the Department of Transportation, which will be completed in about a month, will give us a better idea about what options are best for the 27th District.

## Raise the minimum wage

A growing coalition of legislators is calling for an increase in the state minimum wage, which at \$4.90 is the lowest on the West Coast. Anyone who adds up their monthly bills for basic necessities can see that workers can't get by on \$4.90 an hour.

There is widespread agreement that a raise in the minimum wage is overdue, but no agreement as to what the raise should be. One proposal


being considered would raise the state minimum wage to \$5.70 next year and \$6.50 in the year 2000, with automatic adjustments for inflation in later years. Other proposals are sure to emerge in the course of the session. I want to hear more options before I make a final decision, but it is clear to me that some level of increase in the minimum wage is necessary this year.

## I want to hear from you

This is your legislature, and I always want to hear your questions, concerns and opinions of what is taking place here in Olympia. An excellent way to stay informed (*and keep me informed*), is the Legislative Hotline (1-800-562-6000 / TDY: 1-800-635-9993).

With the hotline, you can send a message to all the legislators in the 27th District along with messages to Governor Locke or Lt. Governor Owen. The hotline is also a great way to keep track of bills and committee hearings on legislation.

The hotline is a toll-free call. It's open from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday during the session and from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on the weekends. I hope you'll take advantage of it!!

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House of Representatives

**Debbie Regala**  
Representative

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